

VZCZCXRO9819
PP RUEHAG RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHLB #1557/01 3050834
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 310834Z OCT 08
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3412
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3106
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 3315
RHMFISS/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 001557

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR IO A/S HOOK, PDAS WARLICK
P FOR DRUSSELL AND RRANGASWAMY
USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/SCHEDLBAUER/GERMAIN
NSC FOR ABRAMS/RAMCHAND/YERGER/MCDERMOTT
DOD FOR OSD A/S MBLONG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/29/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [MARR](#) [MOPPS](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: UNSCOL ENCOURAGES A/S HOOK TO URGE GOL TO
TAKE CONTROL OF ITS TERRITORY

REF: A. BEIRUT 1515
[1](#)B. BEIRUT 1498

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) New UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon (UNSCOL) Michael Williams told visiting Assistant Secretary Brian Hook and the Ambassador October 30 that the GOL needs to take control of all of its territory. Williams said that in the south, Hizballah is the dominant force; and absent a real GOL presence would remain under Hizballah control. On Ghajar, Williams threatened that the Israelis should show significant progress on withdrawal from the territory or face "stronger language" against it in Williams' next report to the UN. Ghajar, he said, is not as complicated as Shebaa Farms. Furthermore, the GOL must take ownership of its responsibility under UNSCR 1701 to prevent continued smuggling along its porous northern border with Syria. Despite the formation of a GOL coordinating committee to address the issue, Williams was not convinced that the GOL was ready to seriously address the challenge. Williams welcomed U.S. support to rebuild the Nahr al-Barid refugee camp and U.S. commitments to provide assistance, from the most basic to the most advanced, to the Lebanese Armed Forces. However, Williams remained concerned about the increase in violence in the Palestinian refugee camps and the possibility that the camps are a conduit for weapons smuggling. End summary.

NO OPTION OTHER THAN
HIZBALLAH IN THE SOUTH

[1](#)2. (C) The new UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon (UNSCOL) Michael Williams told visiting Assistant Secretary for International Organization Affairs Brian Hook on October 30 that Hizballah was the "dominant force" in south Lebanon. Meeting at UNSCOL headquarters in downtown Beirut, Williams continued that Hizballah was an "extraordinarily methodical organization" and that absent a Lebanese government presence in the south, Hizballah would continue to fill the void. Williams informed A/S Hook, accompanied by the Ambassador, IO Special Assistant, and Poloffs that the UN Interim Force in Lebanon's (UNIFIL) mandate only applies to a very small area, approximately 20 km of land between the Litani River and the

"Blue Line." According to Williams, everything south of the Litani is in Hizballah territory, although he noted that a few small Christian villages live in peace with Hizballah there. Williams said he doubted that Hizballah maintained significant weapons caches south of the Litani, but suspected that most of the weapons were located in areas north of the river, where UNIFIL cannot operate.

13. (C) Williams called the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) deployment to areas in south Lebanon a positive development that came out of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1701.

However, he said an immediate problem is that the LAF is stretched thin; one of its units in the south has been redirected to address problems in the north (Ref B). Williams said that despite 1701's positive attributes, the "Lebanese government has not deployed to the south" or in areas along the northern border in any significant way. In fact, he said, Prime Minister Siniora outright refused an offer by then-UN SYG Kofi Annan to go to the south after the passage of 1701. Ambassador Sison added that she learned after her own June visit to Nabatiyeh that no cabinet ministers have gone to the south either. Williams encouraged A/S Hook, and the international community writ large, to urge the GOL to take control of its territory. "For such a small country, it is surprising this has not occurred yet," he said.

"NOT RESOLVING GHAJAR IS A
POLITICAL GIFT TO HIZBALLAH"

14. (C) Williams and UNSCOL Political Officer Salvatore

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Pedulla said that contrary to Israeli logic, not resolving the issue of Ghajar would be a "political gift" to Hizballah.

Williams said that Ghajar, an area that the United Nations believes is being illegally occupied by Israeli settlers, could be easily solved, if Israel withdrew from the territory and honored a previous decision taken by then-Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's government in 2000. Williams reported that UNIFIL Commander Claudio Graziano had recently met with Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak to reiterate the message that Israel should take steps to withdraw from the area. Barak reportedly gave no indication as to what next steps the Israelis were considering in Ghajar. Without significant progress on Ghajar, Williams said, he will be forced to use "stronger language" against Israel in his next report to the UN (Ref A).

15. (C) Progress on Ghajar, Williams and Pedulla assessed, could give a big boost to the Lebanese government, especially the March 14 coalition, in the upcoming 2009 parliamentary elections. Williams suggested that the Israelis should consider Ghajar in the context of a larger Lebanese strategy that will be important to Israel and noted that Ghajar is less complicated than the issue of Shebaa Farms. Williams told A/S Hook that although UNSCOL could not be certain of the outcome of the 2009 elections, he said the Israelis should not discount the possibility that Hizballah and its allies will make additional political gains, just as it did after the signing of the May 2008 Doha agreement. Williams asked for continued U.S. support on the issue of Ghajar, saying, "We need (U.S.) support, for our Lebanese friends and for the sake of 1701."

16. (C) On Shebaa Farms, Williams warned A/S Hook that PM Siniora is stubborn and refuses to entertain the possibility of indirect talks with Israel. While Williams believed progress on Shebaa would also be significant, he said it was hard to gauge who in the Lebanese government would work for this in the electoral period. He advised that working through the Syrians on Shebaa may be the best solution, as Syrian President Asad had already stated that Shebaa is a three-way problem between Syria, Lebanon, and Israel.

17. (C) A/S Hook said that in his conversations with

representatives of the Israeli government in recent days, the Israelis were concerned that the UN reports inflated the numbers of Israeli overflights over Lebanese territory and reflected unbalanced reporting. Williams said he understood Israel's security concerns as the reason behind the overflights. However, he reminded A/S Hook that according to 1701 any overflight was considered a "gross violation" of the resolution. Williams informed A/S Hook and the Ambassador that he planned to travel to Israel for a series of meetings from November 2-4. He hoped to continue to Syria following those meetings, but the Syrians had not yet confirmed.

GOL NEEDS TO TAKE OWNERSHIP
OF ITS NORTHERN BORDER

18. (C) Williams said that PM Siniora told him ten days earlier that the GOL had formed a coordinating committee to develop a strategy to deal with Lebanon's porous northern border with Syria. The coordinating committee, consists of the Prime Minister, LAF Commander Jean Kahwagi and Minister of Interior Ziad Baroud, Williams said. The formation of the committee was a welcome start, but Williams remained concerned that there was not enough political will on the part of the GOL to begin implementing recommendations from the August 2008 report by Lebanon's Independent Border Assessment Team (LIBAT). Pedulla added that in the northern border region, smuggling of all kinds was occurring, such as weapons, fuel, appliances, etc. The Prime Minister and other government figures were reluctant to take on this project, partially out of fear of violence between the LAF and residents of the border communities who benefit from the flow of goods, Pedulla analyzed.

19. (C) If the GOL was serious about taking ownership to implement LIBAT's recommendations, Williams believed that the

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European Union or other countries could then be encouraged to take a role in assisting the GOL with its objectives. However, Williams insisted that the first step must come from the GOL. A/S Hook asked whether it would be helpful for the U.S. to encourage its EU interlocutors to offer this kind of assistance to Lebanon, and Williams responded, "absolutely." Williams said that frankly, there was not much more the UN could do in its approach to the GOL. In addition, Pedulla believed that new opportunities could be on the horizon due to the establishment of diplomatic relations between Lebanon and Syria that would make GOL action on the northern border politically easier than before.

PALESTINIAN CAMPS ARE A CONCERN

10. (C) Williams thanked the Ambassador and A/S Hook for the U.S. commitment to rebuilding the Nahr al-Barid (NAB) Palestinian refugee camp. He said he attended the October 29 rubble removal ceremony and reminded "Arab friends" that they had not been supportive enough with their financial pledges and assistance to NAB. The Ambassador reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to rebuild NAB and to bolster the LAF. The U.S. she said received a lot of criticism for providing things that were perceived as "less important," such as bullet proof vests, to the LAF. However, she said, many did not realize that the LAF needs a great deal of assistance, from the most basic (bullet proof vests) to the most advanced (helicopters). Williams agreed and said he welcomed the U.S. approach to the LAF. The LAF is one of the few state institutions, but under Syrian rule, the LAF was little more than a gendarmerie, he explained.

11. (C) The Ambassador said that reports on Beddawi camp, also in the north, were of concern. Beddawi, Williams said, was not the only concern, but Ain el Hilweh and the other refugee camps were also. He pointed out that many of the camps and other Palestinian areas in the north are located in

the space between Lebanon and Syria. Williams suspected that much of the weapons smuggling in Lebanon is transiting through the Palestinian camps. The added complication, Williams informed Hook, was that the LAF was prohibited from entering the camps.

¶12. (U) A/S Hook has cleared this message.
SISON